Wolf Hunt

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Wolf Hunt

by justheretoreadhannibalfics

Summary

The wolf has lived alongside the village in relative peace for years, but that all changes when a girl is killed, and her father claims the wolf is to blame. A hunting party is organized, but Will wants no part of it.

Notes

Happy Birthday, Stellar_infires. I hope you enjoy this. It's the longest one-shot I have ever written to this point, by about two thousand words. If I had started earlier, or just worked on it more, I have no doubt it would have ended up being much, much longer. (I did not watch the movie again to make sure I was getting everything the way I wanted, so *shrugs*)
It also is probably not the most polished or clean fic, but that's about par for the course with my stories. So you get what you get, I guess.

See the end of the work for more notes

“Don’t you have important things to be doing today?” Will asked, glancing at Hannibal from the corner of his eye.

Not that he was complaining. He enjoyed having Hannibal along, and was glad he had come.

Hannibal smiled.

“Nothing that cannot wait,” he said, “I have seen far too little of you recently, and would rectify that if I can.”

Will couldn’t help his own smile. Hannibal was just about the only person who could get him to smile without meaning to.

“Well, I’m glad for the company,” Will replied, “and if by chance something large stumbled into the traps, I’ll be glad for your help. I don’t fancy carrying a deer back by myself.”

Hannibal gave Will a knowing glance.

Hannibal’s expressions were always warm like that when they were alone together. He didn’t seem as careful and practiced. It made Will pleased and warm whenever he thought of it, but he wasn’t entirely sure it meant anything. Hannibal acted differently around him, but that might not necessarily be a good thing.

“You are quite capable of it,” Hannibal said mildly, his smile still in place.

Will flushed a bit.

It was true. A deer wouldn’t really be that much of a hassle. He had done it before. He didn’t let most see him do that kind of thing, though, because it had made people nervous around him before. He didn’t look that strong, so they were uncomfortable thinking he was.

“I would still appreciate an extra hand,” he said.

Hannibal nodded, still smiling pleasantly.

Hannibal also had a way of concealing his strength. Will knew for a fact he was capable of carrying a grown deer himself if it was ever needed. But Hannibal let others do the heavy lifting and show off their strength when a task needed to be done. He was soft spoken and intelligent. Perhaps it was how non-confrontational he was. Will might be the only person to know of that other side to Hannibal.

Winston stopped in his tracks ahead of Will and gave a few quick barks. Will felt the blood leave his face and he turned to Hannibal.

“Would you mind staying here?” he asked.

Hannibal frowned, his brow furrowing in confusion.

“Can I not help you?” he asked, “what is it?”

Will shook his head, already moving away from Hannibal toward where he knew the snare had been set.

“I’ll call to you, or I’ll come back,” he said, “but please, wait here.”

Hannibal stayed where he was, though his expression of bewilderment remained.

“Very well,” he said, “be careful.”

Will sighed in relief and nodded quickly before turning and heading toward the snare.

Winston led the way, though he stopped about twenty feet away from the trap.

A large grey wolf had his leg caught in the snare. The wolf seemed fresh, as if he had not been there for long. A day at most. It was staring at Will and Winston, the top lip pulling into a silent snarl.

Will knew it would not be silent anymore the moment he took another step forward.

Will motioned for Winston to sit and be quiet. The dog obeyed, though his ears were up and his eyes were fixed on the wolf. If it came to it, Will knew Winston wouldn’t stand a chance against the wolf. But he wouldn’t go down quietly.

Will stepped forward, and the low growl came as he expected.

Will carefully placed his bag on the ground, keeping his eyes on the wolf. When he met the eyes of the wolf, Will slowly bowed his head so he was staring at his own shoes. When he slowly raised his head again, the wolf’s ears had lifted, and the snarl had stopped. The wolf looked more curious than anything, now.

Will spread his hands and took another step forward. The wolf didn’t snarl again, but its lip twitched in a threat of it.

Will took another step, bowing his head again, slowly. The wolf relaxed a bit more, and Will walked closer. He was not yet in range for the wolf to bite or scratch him if it wanted to, but it didn’t really seem to want to either.

“I’m just going to cut the rope,” Will said softly, making the words into a soothing hum to keep the wolf calm.

Will shot his hand out at the same time as he drew his knife from his belt, in one smooth motion grabbing the wolf by the scruff of its neck and cut the rope holding its leg.

The wolf snapped its teeth at Will, but was held away by Will’s hand on its neck. He heard the clack as its powerful jaws came closed, wanting his flesh between its teeth.

Will put away his knife and pushed the wolf away from himself. He spread his hands again to show he was no longer armed, and backed slowly away.

The wolf would likely have attacked him still if it had not been alone. They were braver and more confident when with the pack. The pack wouldn't be far away. Will was sure of that. They wouldn't have abandoned him.

The wolf snarled at Will, but turned and left him without taking even a step toward him. Will sighed, his muscles relaxing as he went about undoing the rope of the snare.

Out of respect for that wolf and his pack, Will would take the snare somewhere else. Wolves were smart, and he believed they were clever enough to remember this place. He wouldn't be surprised if they came back to destroy any snares he left in this area.

"Come, Winston," Will said, and they started back toward Hannibal.

Will could have killed the wolf and brought it back. If nothing else, Garrett Jacob Hobbs would have been pleased to take the pelt. He could have done something with the rest of the body, Will had no doubt.

But Will didn't like to kill wolves. They had a way about them that made him believe they were intelligent and feeling creatures. They weren't like deer or rabbits, who had a sort of empty stare that made him feel they knew nothing beyond their own survival.

The way the wolf had looked at him, how it had reacted to his gestures of good faith, and had left him unharmed. All those things convinced Will they were creatures of a higher level.

He had no real desire to explain that to Hannibal. That was why he had asked him to stay behind. If anyone in e the village heard of what he had done, he would be seen as even more of an outsider than he already was. He had no desire to do that.

Hannibal was standing with his hands clasped, just as proper as could be. His hair shone like straw in the dappled sun coming through the autumn leaves. He was the most handsome man Will had ever seen, and Will's heart jumped about wildly in his chest.

Hannibal smiled and red sparks flew in his eyes as they too caught the light. Will thought he might lose his mind.

"Am I to be left in the dark forever?" Hannibal asked, his tone almost playful, "or will you tell me what it was I must not go with you to do?"

Will huffed a laugh, shoving down all his thrashing feelings to pretend nothing was the matter.

"Winston smelled a wolf," he said, that part true enough, "it got to the animal stuck in my snare. I had to take down the snare, and there was not much left of the little thing. I think it had been a fawn. I worried the wolf would still be around, and did not want you to be in danger. It wasn't."

Hannibal huffed a soft laugh.

"You consider me so weak?" he teased.

Will rolled his eyes and they started off towards the next snare.

“Forgive me for caring for your welfare,” he said, lifting his chin in mock proud defiance, “perhaps next time I shall send you out in the woods alone with a skinned rabbit tied ‘bout your neck. I am sure the wolves would not think of crossing you then.”

Hannibal laughed aloud. Will loved his laugh, the rich and full one he rarely showed.

“Forgive me, Will,” Hannibal said, reaching out and taking Will’s sleeve in hand, “I did not intend to question your motivations. It pleases me to see you speak with such conviction. I confess to antagonizing you for that alone.”

Will flushed, glancing down at where Hannibal’s hand gripped the fabric of his shirt. If it had been anyone else, Will would have not stopped to think before tearing his arm away from their touch. He did not enjoy being touched.

Except by Hannibal.

“I shall forgive you if there is something in the next trap,” Will said flippantly, turning to watch Winston though he did not pull his sleeve from Hannibal’s fingers, “you’d best hope we have luck where there was none from my last snare.”

Hannibal pulled gently at Will’s sleeve again, stepping close and speaking into Will’s ear.

“Is forgiveness the only reward I can expect for our success?” he asked lowly.

Will suppressed a shiver.

“That is entirely dependent on what degree our success is to,” he said, impressing himself with how level his voice emerged despite Hannibal being so close he could feel the heat from his body in the cool autumn air.

Hannibal huffed another laugh, his breath warming Will’s ear, and released him to follow Winston to the next snare.

Hannibal moved nearly silently through the woods. Will had learned to be quiet in his journey over the years, but Hannibal seemed to accomplish it naturally. As if he had been born with the ability to conceal himself in the forest.

Will let out a breath he had not been aware had been trapped in his lungs, and followed.

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Will was laying in his bed and staring at the ceiling, trying not to think about Hannibal and failing, when the scream came.

Will bolted up out of his bed, and saw Winston already at the door, ears flat and growling lowly. Will pulled on his boots and cloak quickly and stepped out into the chill night air.

The scream had been cut short, and Will couldn't hear any more sounds of fear or struggle. But he knew where it had come from. Further in town.

Will ran, feeling as if his feet flew over the ground as he made his way toward where the scream had come from. It had been a familiar voice, though warped with terror. Will only hoped he was wrong about the owner.

The blood moon was high in the sky, and Will knew it was possible the wolf was around. Most would not dare to come out despite the scream. Terror of the wolf was too great.

There, by the side of a house, crouched Garrett Jacob Hobbs. He was cradling his daughter to his chest and weeping as a pool of blood spread around them.

It had been Abigail after all.

Will let out an involuntary sound of grief, drawing the attention of Abigail's father faster than a whiplash. His eyes were wide and mournful, and accusing.

"Don't you come near," he hissed at Will, drawing a knife from his belt and brandishing it over Abigail's pale corpse.

Will stopped in his tracks and showed his hands to demonstrate he was unarmed. A frightened man was far more dangerous than a frightened wolf. Will didn't dare take another step.

"It's because of you she's dead," Hobbs spat, and Will had no idea what he meant by it. He didn't have to wonder long. "You, wandering in the woods as if you own them. No respect for the creature. You've angered it, and now look."

Hobbs let out a deep sob that must have hurt. The kind that felt it would tear your entire abdomen apart to show the agony of your grief.

"I should have never let her speak to you," Hobbs cried, his hand holding the knife drooping as if losing the strength to hold it up, "I saw how she followed you, as if she was a lost child. And that's what she was."

Hobbs lowered his head and let his tears fall into Abigail's long brown hair. Will didn't take another step, not wanting to make Hobbs angry or upset again. He needed room to grieve.

Running steps came up behind Will, and Beverly stopped in her tracks when she saw what had happened.

"Oh my god. We need to get Hannibal," she said.

Will shook his head.

"He left this afternoon. He had to speak with someone in Chantilly."

Beverly cursed under her breath. She didn't seem to know what to do.

“He will be back in the morning,” Will said, “he can look at her then. There is nothing to be done tonight but take her out of the open.”

Hobbs seemed to have heard Will, because he stood, holding Abigail in his arms, and carried her towards his own home. Will and Beverly stood together, watching him go.

“Do you think it was the wolf?” Beverly asked quietly.

Will shrugged, feeling the weight of the sleep he had yet to get that night. He would go home and mourn Abigail privately.

“Hannibal will be able to tell us,” he said, “but it shouldn’t have been. We’ve done everything we’re supposed to to stay safe.”

Beverly nodded.

“Too bad it was Abigail. I’m sorry, Will. I know you cared about her.”

Will nodded in thanks, but didn’t say anything.

Abigail had been too young to die. It may have been a terrible way to think, but Will thought it would even have been better if her father had been the one to be killed. Garrett Jacob Hobbs had always unnerved Will. And he knew Abigail felt the same way. Part of the reason she spent so much time talking to Will was to avoid her dad. Will was the only person who made Hobbs nervous, at least as far as he could tell. Will thought it might be because Will was the only person who didn’t really like him.

Will didn’t think Hannibal was all that fond of Hobbs, though he hid it far better than Will did, but Hannibal did like Abigail.

Will had sometimes wished he could leave the village. Take Hannibal and Abigail with him. Beverly would be welcome, but he didn’t think she would want to come. Will knew Abigail would have gone if he had ever asked. It was really Hannibal that gave him pause. Hannibal didn’t seem unhappy here. At least not in the way both Will and Abigail were. He got along with people and functioned as a member of their small society.

He might not want to leave.

That was why Will had never asked. He couldn’t imagine leaving without Hannibal.

Will remembered Hannibal’s warm breath in his ear and shivered, opening the door to his little house. He paused when he heard the low howl. It was only just beyond the tree line, and it was a large wolf. It was loud and strong, but not threatening. Despite what had just happened, Will was not frightened by it.

He stood for a moment, watching the trees for any sign of the creature, but it didn’t make itself known to him.

Will stepped inside with Winston and closed the door to shut out the world.

Winston sat by the hearth, though there was no fire. Only the coals from late that evening. He watched as Will collapsed into the little bed and gave in to the quiet sobs trapped in his chest. They ached, as if vying to break out. He hurt all over at the idea that Abigail was gone.

Winston padded over and stood up with his front paws on the bed beside Will, nosing at him and whining.

Through his sorrow, Will knew he could get comfort from the dog, and Winston had loved Abigail as well. If he understood any part of what had happened, he would want comfort as well.

So Will let Winston climb up and share the bed with him. He wrapped his arms around Winston and buried his face in the soft fur.

Will cried until he fell asleep.

—

Will bolted upright in his bed when a knock came at his door. He glanced over and saw light streaming in through the window.

He didn't usually sleep that long.

Will went to his door and found Alana on the other side. She looked him over with a frown.

"I woke you up," she noted, "and you slept in your clothes. Why were you still asleep?"

Will ran a hand through his hair, hoping it wasn't too much of a mess.

"I was up late last night," he offered, sure his eyes were still red from crying, "what can I do for you?"

Alana pressed her lips together, as if he had done something worth her disappointment, but she was graciously not going to mention it.

"Hannibal's back, and he's looking at Abigail."

Will felt his heart jump in his chest at the mention of Hannibal, and a pang of renewed sorrow at Abigail's name.

"I'm coming," he said, turning to get his cloak.

"It might be best if you didn't," Alana said, making Will stop in his tracks.

He turned back and raised an eyebrow at her questioningly.

Alana was slightly flushed, as beautiful as ever in the dappled sunlight. It was still morning, but the sun had been up for some time. Will had really slept in.

“I only mean, there are certain people who wouldn’t react well to your presence right now,” Alana explained, her eyes wide and pleading, beseeching him to understand.

He did.

Garrett Jacob Hobbs didn’t want him there. Abigail’s father didn’t want Will to be there when they found out if it was the wolf.

“I’m sorry about that,” Will said, snagging his cloak and motioning for Winston to come to his side, “but she was my friend and I intend to honor her.”

Will pulled the hood of his cloak up over his head as they walked, hoping Hobbs either wouldn’t notice him or wouldn’t recognize him. The grieving were less prone to close observation.

Most of the village had gathered outside the Hobbs home, eager to hear the news from Hannibal’s inspection. Will looked at them all with no small amount of bitterness, remembering that none of them had appeared to help when Abigail had been attacked. They had all been too concerned with their own safety, leaving her to the wolves both figuratively and literally. But now they all creased their brows in a parody of sorrow and concern, shifting on their feet and darting their eyes about as if someone might call them out for their hypocrisy.

Will might have done just that, if not for three simple reasons.

Alana was with him, for one, and he had no desire to either drag her into his troubles or make her cross with him in any way.

For another, he was sure it would disappoint Hannibal, and he had even less desire to do that than to inconvenience Alana.

Lastly, and perhaps the most true of his reasons for not causing a problem, he stayed quiet because he had loved Abigail, and it would feel disrespectful to her to do such a thing at the moment. Before she had even been properly buried.

At length, the door of the house opened, and Garrett Jacob Hobbs emerged, wielding his rifle and lifting his head proudly. Hannibal stood behind him, his mouth set in a thin line of displeasure. Hannibal’s eyes immediately set upon Will and caught, despite Will’s attempts to blend in with the crowd.

“The wolf killed my daughter,” Hobbs announced, making the crowd stir restlessly, “and I intend to kill it.”

The crowd cheered, a few men more enthusiastic than Will thought was entirely necessary. Hobbs hushed them quickly in order to continue, now in command.

Will might have been the best trapper in the village, but everyone knew Hobbs was the best hunter. In an endeavor like this, even separated from his personal stake, he would be the natural choice for a leader.

“I need all the able men to arm themselves and join me to the cave where the wolf lives,” he called, his voice carrying and grating on Will’s nerves.

At once, the crowd began to disperse, the men eager to begin the hunt.

Will pulled his cloak closer around his throat and tried to be unseen as he fought the tide of people.

There was something wrong. Hannibal’s expression had been enough to tell him that. Will didn’t know if he could avoid being pulled into the hunt, but he wanted to find out why Hannibal had looked so displeased when Hobbs announced the results of his investigation.

Will stood in the shadows by the side of the Hobbs house, and waited for Hannibal to emerge. In the confusion after Hobbs’ announcement, he and Hannibal had disappeared back into the house. Will knew they would not remain inside long, because Hobbs was anxious to leave and Hannibal had finished his work. They would be out soon enough.

“Hello, Will.”

Will almost jumped at Hannibal’s voice from behind him. He hadn’t heard him walk up, and had been expecting him from a different direction. Not that Will would have expected to hear Hannibal approach regardless. He moved silently all the time.

“Hannibal. God. What on earth is going on?” Will asked, glancing around and taking Hannibal’s arm to pull him further away from the center of town, “you looked upset. Does Hobbs really believe he can kill it?”

Hannibal allowed himself to be pulled, slowly sliding his arm so Will’s hand came closer to his as they walked, a small smile on his lips.

“Of course I am upset,” he said, his smile faltering, “I was very fond of Abigail. Furthermore, her father is using her death for his own advantage. It is impossible for her to have been killed by the wolf.”

Will stopped suddenly, Hannibal nearly bumping into him as he stopped as well.

“The wolf didn’t kill her?” Will asked, confused.

“Unless the wolf has taken to using knives rather than teeth,” Hannibal confirmed, “her throat was cut, and I found no evidence of wolf bites or mauling.”

Will digested that for a moment.

“Hobbs is hunting it regardless,” he noted.

Hannibal nodded, setting a hand on the small of Will’s back and guiding him towards Will’s home on the outside of the village.

“Indeed. He is fixed on the idea of killing it. I rather think he did not have a chance of being supported or joined by the village if he did not claim the wolf is responsible.”

Will huffed.

“The wolf is innocent,” he growled, “and he means to kill it.”

Then something occurred to Will, and he smiled.

“They aren’t going to find it in the cave, though,” he said.

Hannibal looked at Will curiously.

“Why is that?” he asked.

Will huffed a soft laugh. What he was about to say would sound strange. If it were anyone else with him, he would not have said it for fear of them misunderstanding. With Hannibal, he knew he would be believed.

“Because the wolf doesn’t live there,” he said, “I might not have any proof, but I’m sure of it. First of all, it doesn’t make any sense for it to. That cave isn’t the kind of place wolves hang around unless forced to. Additionally, I believe the wolf is highly intelligent. Wolves in general are incredibly smart, and this one is more so. It heads towards that cave whenever it is seen, so we think that is where it lives. It’s laying a false trail. I bet it lives somewhere entirely other.”

Hannibal hummed in amusement, shaking his head wonderingly.

“You never cease to amaze me, Will,” he said, “and I would ask you to do something, for me.”

Will turned to Hannibal, frowning in concern. Hannibal rarely asked for anything. If he needed something from Will, it was serious.

“What is it?” Will asked, knowing already that he was going to do whatever it was. He hadn’t been able to refuse Hannibal anything for years now, and he wasn’t likely to start today.

“Do not go on that hunt with them,” Hannibal said, his voice soft and gentle, “The wolf may not be in that cave, but I know it will be dangerous. Please.”

Will felt his face flush. Hannibal was being abnormally tender in this moment, his hand still on Will’s back, pulling them close together. Will could feel the heat of Hannibal’s body, and the slight breeze of his breath.

“I was already planning to do whatever I could to avoid it,” Will told him with a small smile, “I don’t really enjoy hunting wolves. I wouldn’t enjoy killing it if they found it. I hope they don’t.”

Hannibal smiled.

“You do not hesitate to speak your mind, even when such an opinion would gain you no favors from the people of the town,” he said, “I do admire that in you.”

Will rolled his eyes, but couldn't stop himself from blushing deeper. Hannibal was acting differently, and he wasn't sure why.

"I don't hesitate because it's you," he said, starting to pull away. They were among the trees, now, very near to his house. "I know you are not about to retaliate against me. You suggested I not go first."

Hannibal seized Will by the arms and pushed him up against the nearest tree, capturing his mouth in a devouring kiss. It startled Will so badly he let out a gasp, and had little time to react. It was just about the last thing he had expected from Hannibal, and even as he kissed back, Will couldn't quite process that it was happening.

They parted, leaving Will gasping and Hannibal staring at him with shining eyes. He was gorgeously handsome in the shifting light of the forest.

"What," Will managed to gasp out after a moment.

Hannibal smiled, lifting his hands to Will's hair so his forearms held Will's shoulders pinned to the tree.

"I have been in love with you since the day we met, Will," Hannibal said, his tone warmly frank, "I would ask you to run away with me, somewhere all our own."

Will's eyes were wide with wonder and surprise. He felt as if he must have heard wrong, or was imagining the entire thing. Hannibal was suggesting exactly what he had always wanted, but had feared to ask for.

But Abigail.

Will curled his hands into the fabric of Hannibal's coat, pulling him closer and holding him.

"Give me some time," he asked, desperate to be understood.

Uncertainty flickered across Hannibal's face, making Will hold him tighter.

"All I want is to find Abigail's killer. You say it's not the wolf, and I believe it. But that means there is someone among us who killed her. I would see them punished."

Hannibal's features relaxed and he smiled again. He leaned in and kissed Will thoroughly once more, leaving him again breathless.

"Of course, Will," he said, "I would have taken her with us if she were here."

Will nodded.

It was strange to learn that Hannibal's wishes aligned so perfectly to his own. Especially after so fearing rejection from him.

—

“Will. Arm yourself and prepare for the hunt.”

Will glanced up from where he had been preparing a basket for fishing. Hobbs and Matthew stood in his doorway, at least polite enough to not enter without invitation. Winston watched curiously from the foot of Will’s bed, his head tipped in that cute canine way of his.

“I will not be accompanying you,” Will told the men carefully, “I am set to fish today, as it is the right weather for it and may be the last such day before winter sets in.”

Hobbs scowled, and Matthew only watched Will with interest.

“All able men must come,” Hobbs insisted, “To avenge my daughter. She was your friend.”

Will’s anger flashed hot, but he refused to show it. This man had accused him of being the reason she was dead, but now appealed to him as having been her friend. What a hypocrite.

“I am no hunter, as you well know,” Will said, “and I believe I would only hinder your attempts. In any case, killing the wolf will benefit me in no way. It will not bring Abigail back.”

Hobbs was properly angry, now, but Matthew’s presence seemed to keep him from acting exactly as he wished. His face was red and his eyes were flashing, and Will thought he may well have tried to kill him otherwise. As it was, Hobbs let his anger show plainly.

“You would have us spare the killer wolf?” he demanded.

Will stared at him, furrowing his brow.

Why had Hobbs lied? Why was he so keen to kill the wolf, when he knew it had not killed Abigail? Why did he want Will to come, when he clearly had no strong affection towards him?

Pieces began falling into place, and Will felt his heart speed up in fear and excitement.

“Did you see the wolf kill her?” he asked, keeping his voice even and calm.

Hobbs’ scowl deepened.

“Doctor Lecter said it was the wolf,” he argued, though his expression clearly betrayed the lie.

“Did he?”

Hobbs couldn’t argue any further, so stomped away, almost like a child. Matthew stood in the door for a moment longer, his expression unreadable.

“Leave me,” Will said, and Matthew obeyed.

Will made his way to the stream, though he had no intention of being there long. He was just waiting until the hunting party had left. He would catch something while he waited, probably,

so he would have evidence that he really had gone fishing if anyone bothered to ask.

Winston sat by the shore, watching Will lazily while he guarded the basket.

Will closed his eyes and tilted his face up into the sun, smiling as the light warmed his face. He listened to the sound of the leaves rustling, and the water burbling by, feeling the area like a balm on his soul. He always felt better when he could get further away from the village. There were no people with personalities that could grate on his nerves.

A bite came, and Will reeled in the fish, smiling as he turned back to shore to put it into the basket.

Will nearly dropped the fish back into the water in surprise when he saw Hannibal there.

Hannibal was sitting on a blanket he had apparently spread out and set on without making a sound. Winton was curled up against his leg, and Hannibal was gently carding a hand through his fur. He was smiling gently while he watched Will.

Will huffed a laugh and waded to where Hannibal and Winston were sitting.

“Do you find it entertaining to sneak up on people?” Will asked, setting the fish into the basket.

If it had been anyone else, Will would have expected Winston to warn him. A soft and friendly woof at the very least. But not Hannibal.

Hannibal continued to smile.

“Only you, Will,” he said warmly, reaching out and catching Will’s shirt to pull him closer. Will huffed another laugh and allowed himself to be pulled until he was in the circle of Hannibal’s arms. “You are particularly beautiful when you are unaware you are being observed.”

Will flushed and dropped his head against Hannibal’s shoulder to hide it. Hannibal turned his head so his nose pressed against the skin under Will’s ear and inhaled softly.

Hannibal was smelling him.

Will’s flush deepened.

“You also find it entertaining to make me uncomfortable,” he noted, “especially now. I almost wonder if that’s the only reason you decided to tell me you’re in love with me.”

Hannibal hummed.

“How curious that you would be less comfortable around me when you learn your feelings are reciprocated,” he mused, “Unless, of course, you do not feel the same way and are for some reason merely humoring me. I would find that somewhat disappointing at this juncture.”

Will began shaking with laughter. He couldn't help it. Despite the blunt and objective way Hannibal said it, Will still felt as if it betrayed some level of insecurity and doubt. The idea that Hannibal could ever be insecure about anything was ridiculous. He was universally adored. The one exception possibly being Hobbs, and only because Hannibal dared to contradict him on issues like this one with the wolf.

"You brilliant fool," he huffed, "you're the most intelligent person in this village, but you can't tell that I've been in love with you for years."

Hannibal caught Will in a kiss, his arms like an iron trap holding Will pressed to him.

Will was lost to sensation, entirely overcome by the way he and Hannibal seemed to fit together as if made for each other. Hannibal knew the exact way to hold Will, how to touch him.

Suddenly, Hannibal flipped them over so Will was on his back on the blanket, and Hannibal was over him. Will let out a gasp at the sudden change, but saw that Hannibal was looking up at the trees. He was hovering protectively over Will, like a predator over a fresh kill when they hear a competitor approach.

Will stilled, holding his breath and listening. If Hannibal had heard something, Will hadn't. He didn't know what it was.

"Sorry! I didn't mean to interrupt! I can leave!"

It was Beverly.

Hannibal huffed softly, smiling and sitting back on his heels.

"No, not at all," he said pleasantly, "I presume you were looking for Will."

Beverly stepped out from the trees, her cheeks dark with a blush. She must have walked right up on them and been surprised.

Will blushed, too, lifting himself onto his elbows and glancing over his shoulder at her.

"I was," Beverly said with a nod, "I wanted to tell him that someone's been called. A hunter from Haymarket. He's said to have killed a wolf like this before. He's coming."

Will felt his skin chill at the thought.

Someone was coming to hunt the wolf. Someone who said they had done it before. Kill it.

"Why? Who called him?" Will asked.

Hannibal moved off of Will so they could both sit facing Beverly. She glanced between them, clearly wanting to ask something. Will could tell she wanted to wait until Hannibal wasn't there, though.

“Well, everyone’s frightened. If he can kill it, we don’t have to worry about it anymore. We won’t have to hide during the full moon, or leave offerings, or be afraid.”

Will frowned. She was trying to defend the decision, though Will hadn’t expressed his opposition to it yet. She was trying to soften it.

“But who called him?” he asked.

Beverly looked down at her boots.

“Alana sent for him,” she said, “but I’m the one who brought him up. I didn’t know they would want him to come. I thought everyone would be satisfied that our hunting party will kill it. I didn’t know.”

Will sighed.

“Of course you didn’t,” he said, “is he who I think he is?”

Beverly offered a sheepish smile.

“Jack Crawford.”

Will nodded. That was going to be a catastrophe. Jack Crawford would do whatever it took to hunt down the wolf and kill it. He was stubborn and brash. Will had no doubt he would easily be able to gain the confidence of the village and lead them to do whatever he asked.

The only question now, was how many people would die in the process.

“Do you know this man?” Hannibal asked.

Will turned and offered a wry smile.

“You could say that,” he said, “he and I had a… disagreement. I don’t think it’s likely he’s forgotten, but I can’t be sure how that may have shaped his opinion of me. He might think we are friendly, or that we are enemies. I can’t be sure.”

In all honesty, he thought it more likely Jack would think they were friends. The man had a hard time accepting anything as the truth that he didn’t like. Strange, for a hunter like him. Jack didn’t think the argument had been a big deal, so thought it had merely been polite banter.

“Certainly, if he does believe you to be friends, you could make your opinion clear to him,” Hannibal said.

Will smiled ruefully.

“What do you think we might have disagreed about?” he asked, “Jack knows very well what I think of his chosen occupation, and I was unable to change his mind all those years ago. If anything, he will expect me to have changed my mind over time.”

Will sighed again and shook his head.

“No, Jack will not be stopped by my reasoning. He is determined and hard. If he is stopped, I’m afraid it will only be because he is killed.”

Hannibal offered no comment on that, apparently pensive on the subject. Beverly cleared her throat, shifting her weight.

“I’m sorry, Will,” she said, “I know you don’t agree with killing the wolf. But with Abigail, it’s just the final straw. I’m sure you understand.”

Will nodded. He did understand. They all believed the sacrifices and protection they had put so much effort into had been in vain. That the wolf had decided to hunt them anyway. IT made them angry and more afraid than ever. He understood.

But their fear also blinded them. Not only would they now not accept the truth if Hannibal told them, but they could not recognize that hunting the wolf would result in more death before any level of success. Will expected more villagers to die before this was over, especially if Jack Crawford was involved.

“Perhaps I might be able to convince him?” Hannibal offered.

Will shrugged.

“You’re welcome to try,” he said, “but Jack Crawford isn’t likely to change his mind if the wolf itself offered a truce. When he sets his mind, even God would hesitate to disagree with him.”

Hannibal smiled, nodding in understanding.

“Uh, I’ll be on my way, then,” Beverly said, clearly still feeling awkward about the position she had caught them in, “you guys can get back to… fishing, or whatever.”

Will flushed slightly, but smiled to her.

“I’ll see you soon, Bev,” he said.

Beverly nodded and turned away, heading back to town through the woods.

“That was certainly unexpected,” Hannibal said, and Will laughed.

“Are you talking about Beverly showing up, or the news she brought?” he asked.

Hannibal smiled and lifted a hand to card his fingers through Will’s hair.

“Both. Are you truly disturbed by this news of the hunter? You seem to think he may succeed in his task.”

Will huffed.

“I’m not worried about the wolf,” he said, though he was, a bit, “I believe it can take care of itself. I fear he may be rash in his decisions, and that he will cause the death or injury of more people in the village. His desire to kill the wolf will overshadow all else.”

Hannibal hummed thoughtfully. If he didn’t know better, Will would have thought he was amused by something.

“We shall see what happens. Do you have any ideas of who Abigail’s killer may have been?”

Will bit his lip. He had one idea, but he hesitated to say it aloud. He didn’t want to accuse an innocent.

But Hannibal might be able to help him think it over.

“I think her father did it,” he admitted.

Hannibal raised an eyebrow, his eyes sparking red as they caught a stray beam of light.

“The devil is in the details,” he said, “what makes you think so?”

Will rubbed at his face, feeling tired and unhappy.

“Everything. He was the first person there, which is understandable, but then he wouldn’t let anyone near her body except you. He lied about what your investigation found, and can’t decide how to act towards me. First, he pushed me away, likely out of fear I would see what he had done, and now he tries to draw me close, possibly to assess what I suspect. His lie covers his tracks, because no one is looking for a human killer.”

“No one but you,” Hannibal noted.

Will scoffed.

“No one but me knows she wasn’t killed by the wolf,” he pointed out, then thought again, “but I don’t think many of them would believe it if you told them. You’re well liked, but you haven’t made yourself powerful the way Hobbs has.”

Hannibal hummed his agreement. He was running his fingers up the back of Will’s head, then down his neck to his shoulders. The touch was both delicious and distracting. Will didn’t understand how his life had changed so completely in just the last two days. He kept worrying he would wake up and find out it had all been a dream. But he also wished for it, because that would mean Abigail would not have to be dead.

“You are brilliant,” Hannibal said, leaning in to kiss Will again, “and I am convinced you are correct about Hobbs. His behavior recently would argue against his innocence. What might have motivated him to kill her, though?”

Will wasn’t entirely sure. He knew the only reason Hobbs might have hurt Abigail on purpose was if he was afraid of losing her.

In that way, Will might have been the reason in some near future, if he had found out about Hannibal's feelings before she had died. He would have asked her to run away with them.

Will's heart sunk, and he turned to Hannibal.

"Did you ask her to run away with us?" he asked softly, afraid of the answer.

Hannibal's hand stilled in Will's hair, and he was silent for a moment before he answered.

"Yes," he said at last, "I asked her if she would. I knew she was not satisfied here, just as I knew you would not want to leave her. Do you think her father found out?"

Will's heart was beating hard and fast. It all made sense, and this meant he was right. IT meant Hobbs had really killed his own daughter.

"Yes. I think he did," Will said, "whether he found out you asked her or not."

Will closed his eyes and swallowed hard.

"Did she say yes?" he asked, knowing this answer would hurt, regardless of what it was, "was she going to come with us?"

Hannibal sighed and pulled Will to him, pressing their foreheads together. He let out a soft breath that Will knew contained sorrow.

"She was," he said, "Will, this is my fault. She is dead because of me."

Will shook his head, his nose bumping against Hannibal's.

"It's not. The only person to blame is the man who killed her. I'm going to see him pay for it. Then, we can go. I'll find out if it's really him. I'll make him confess to me. Then, I'll punish him. I'll make him regret what he's done. When he has felt enough pain, I'll go with you wherever you want to go."

Hannibal crushed Will against him, devouring him in a kiss.

"You are the most dangerously beautiful creature in existence."

—

"So… Hannibal."

Will felt his face flush again, unable to keep his mind from bringing back every moment he had spent with Hannibal in the woods that afternoon.

"What do you want to know?" he asked.

Beverly laughed and pushed him gently by his shoulder.

"I've been waiting for you two to get your act together," she said, "It's been painful to watch you both pining for each other all these years."

Will's face grew hotter, and he ducked his head.

She had known? Will hadn't thought he had been that obvious, and Hannibal sure hadn't been, as far as he had seen. At least it sure hadn't been obvious to him.

"You had no idea?" Beverly asked, sounding honestly doubtful, "I mean, the look on your face every time you saw him, the way you always knew exactly where he was, the way you moped after spending time alone with him because once again nothing happened between you. I'm surprised the entire village wasn't full of gossip about you two."

Will didn't know what to say. IF he had been as obvious as Beverly made it out to be, how had Hannibal not said anything sooner?

"I swear, you two are the smartest people I know, but you're amazingly foolish about some things. Did you never notice that Hannibal would specifically take time out of his day to go see you? You have been his favorite topic of conversation for years, and he always smiles when you're around. Maybe you never noticed because you didn't have anything to compare it to, but he doesn't really smile all that much when you're not around."

Will buried his face in his hands. The way she said it really did make him sound like a fool of the highest order. Honestly, the both of them. He didn't understand how they had gone this long dancing around each other.

Beverly patted him on the shoulder, her own shoulders shaking with silent laughter.

"At least you got there eventually," she said, wiping some tears of mirth from her eyes, "Gonna tell me how it happened?"

Will sighed and shrugged.

"It was sort of sudden," he confessed, "we were talking, and I was agreeing with him, and then he was kissing me."

Beverly made a soft cooing sound, making Will's blush burn hotter.

"You guys are perfect for each other. Perfect fools for each other."

Will huffed a laugh.

"I guess so. Have anything else to tell me that I should already have known about?" he asked.

Beverly's grin wavered, and he knew she had some bad news.

"Hobbs spread some rumors before he left on the hunt," she said, making his anger flare, "I think he's worried you're going to say something about him, so he's making it so no one will believe you."

That sounded about right. The way Will had acted towards him would have made someone like Hobbs sure he knew the truth. Now that Will did, he would have a hard time convincing

anyone of it. It was clever of Hobbs, because this meant Will wouldn't be able to get the support of the people.

So Will would have to exact justice without them. He knew Hannibal would be on his side.

"Probably," Will agreed, "at this point, I wouldn't be surprised."

Beverly studied Will for a long moment.

"What do you think he might be protecting himself from?" she asked, "you guys weren't this unfriendly before."

Will nodded.

"Before, our mutual affection for Abigail kept us from killing each other," he told her, "but now there's no reason for him to hold back."

Beverly considered that, her expression pensive as they walked.

"But you still have to hold back, because he's well liked and you aren't," she guessed, "if you openly began to fight with him, you'd have the village against you."

Will nodded, but didn't have a chance to respond any other way, because Marissa sprinted into the center of town just then, shouting.

"The hunter has arrived from Haymarket!" she called, and doors to every side began to open, bringing the women and children out in a throng, "Sir Jack Crawford from Haymarket has come to kill the wolf!"

Will stopped in place, knowing exactly what to expect from Jack's arrival, and crossed his arms.

On a tall black steed, Jack rode in with a company of five. He wore the pelt of a wolf across his shoulders in an almost sickening display of hubris. He sat on his mount with the air of someone who had come for one purpose, and had every intention of fulfilling that purpose with exactness and speed. Will seemed to be the only person not entirely enchanted by him.

Jack stopped his crew in the center of town and dismounted, his gaze landing on Will curiously, apparently neither entirely surprised nor pleased with the dark scowl Will offered him.

"I hear there is a wolf," Jack declared, his voice carrying strongly through the village streets and filling the people with a sense of safety as he clearly intended to promise their protection, "I have come to slay it."

A cheer erupted, but one voice carried high over it.

"A party has already gone to hunt the wolf just yesterday," it called. Will couldn't be sure who had said it through all the noise.

Jack raised an eyebrow.

“Did they?” he asked, the crowd hushing at his voice, “then I will be here to congratulate them when they return with success.”

Jack met Will’s eyes at the last part of his comment, making Will’s anger flare all the brighter. He knew they wouldn’t kill it. He knew they were looking in the wrong place. Jack knew how smart the wolf was, and knew they would fail. He was preparing to seize the falling spirits of the village and keep them hostage as he made his own efforts. He knew a recent failure would soften them, preparing them for a strong leader.

And Jack was a strong leader. Will knew that well.

The people cheered again, and surged forward to take the horses from their masters and care for them, extend offers of food and rest to the men riding, and all around pander to the well dressed thugs coming in to take charge.

Will was disgusted by their actions. He wanted to get away more than ever.

But not until Hobbs paid.

“Come, Will.”

Hannibal was speaking in Will’s ear, and took Will by the arm as well to pull him away. Will went easily, wanting nothing more to do with the spectacle. He knew he should be expecting Jack to find him sooner than later, though.

When they had reached Hannibal’s home, Hannibal ushered Will inside and began preparing a pot of tea. His face was set in a pensive frown, and Will allowed him space for his thoughts. It was a rare opportunity for anyone to be invited into Hannibal’s home and not nearly smothered with hospitality. Hannibal was a model host, and never appeared too distracted to tend to his guests.

But Will wasn’t just any guest. Not anymore.

“Jack Crawford has killed a wolf before,” Hannibal said, not really a question, but begging an answer regardless.

Will nodded.

“Many, though I only know of one of this nature he can truly claim. He hunts regular wolves as, well, I suppose he would call it sport or practice for his true occupation.”

Hannibal nodded. He handed Will a cup of tea and sat beside him without another word, staring into the light of his fire with a distant gaze. He was so deep in thought Will had the leisure to study him for a long moment. His profile was striking, as Will knew well, and in this intimate light and setting he was even more handsome than Will had ever had the chance to appreciate. His eyes sparked red once more, sending a shiver down Will’s spine and making him feel a bit warmer than usual.

Hannibal turned, possibly because he had seen the movement, and smiled warmly.

“You look beautiful, Will,” he said.

Will felt his breath rush out of him in surprise, and had a hard time filling his lungs back up to reply.

“So do you,” he managed to whisper hoarsely after a moment.

Hannibal’s grin widened, and he set his tea down on the table. He leaned towards Will and traced his nose under Will’s ear, inhaling softly.

“What do you plan to do with Hobbs?” he asked softly, just a breath against the skin of Will’s neck.

Will was a bit distracted at the moment, but managed to think about the answer to the question.

“I want to make him afraid,” he said, “I want him to know he’s going to suffer, and why. And I want to kill him.”

Hannibal parted his lips and let his teeth graze the skin of Will’s neck, making him shiver again. Hannibal was gripping Will’s arms and holding him in place, that unreasonable strength showing openly for the first time Will could recollect.

“How will you kill him?” Hannibal asked, and Will let out a soft gasp when he let his tongue run over Will’s jaw.

“With my hands,” Will said, though he was having a harder time putting sentences together the longer Hannibal continued along this path, “I want to feel the life leave him.”

Hannibal hummed against Will’s skin, making it buzz in a pleasant way.

“That is an intimate way to kill,” he said, “with your hands. Will you enjoy it?”

An alarm was ringing somewhere in the back of Will’s head, telling him he really should think carefully about how to answer that question, if he answered at all. But he was beyond thinking rationally, for the most part.

“I think I will, yes,” he answered, flexing his hands that were trapped at his side but aching to touch just as Hannibal was touching.

Hannibal lifted his head with a snap, pulled suddenly from Will just as he had before, this time letting out a soft growl that sent Will’s mind even further down the path he had been heading.

Then, he heard a call.

“Hannibal!”

It was Alana. She was coming to Hannibal's home.

Will immediately snapped out of his dazed state and jerked in his chair, reflexively wanting to move away from Hannibal and get away from this entire situation. But he was held in place by Hannibal's large, strong hands.

Hannibal's expression was carefully considering, almost amused. He slowly loosened his grip, but didn't let go of Will, and sat back in his own chair. Will moved to get up, but Hannibal's grip tightened and clearly signaled he wanted Will to stay exactly where he was. When Will relaxed again, showing he understood, Hannibal took his hands back and straightened himself to greet Alana.

"Hannibal, are you home?" Alana called, apparently curious about why he hadn't already answered.

"I am," Hannibal replied calmly, taking up his cup of tea again. Will mirrored him, not exactly sure what Hannibal was getting at, but not wanting to be too awkward.

Alana opened the door, her face flushed with pleasure and her hair mildly out of place from a cool autumn wind. She was smiling brightly, but her expression tightened slightly when her eyes landed on Will.

"Oh. Will. I didn't expect you to be here."

Will smiled as naturally as he could, though he felt a spike of annoyance at her for not only interrupting them, but then acting as if he was the intruder.

"What is it you have come for?" Hannibal asked, drawing her attention back to himself pointedly, relaxing into his seat without offering her a chair.

That was uncharacteristically rude of Hannibal, but Will felt darkly pleased about it. Maybe Hannibal felt the same way about Alana's sudden visit.

Alana stood in the doorway, her brow creased in confusion, possibly also noting she hadn't been asked to sit and unsure how to go forward in this situation. Then, she seemed to remember what her purpose was, and light returned to her features.

"They did it," she said, "they killed the wolf."

Hannibal's expression shifted into one of mild surprise, amusement, and complete disbelief. Will thought his own face might show the same, so he covered it by taking a long drink of his tea.

"Jack Crawford's men?" Hannibal asked.

Alana shook her head, her dark hair spilling across her shoulders prettily.

"The men from the town. They've just returned, and they've done it. It's all over!"

Hannibal nodded, setting his teacup on the table and meeting Will's eyes.

“I suppose we should join the crowd to witness the spectacle,” he said, raising an eyebrow in question to see if Will agreed, “shall we?”

Will nodded and set his own cup beside Hannibal’s.

“I guess we should,” he said.

They both stood, Will looking obviously more disheveled than Hannibal apparently had the ability to. Alana didn’t seem to take much note of his appearance, though. She was frowning at the two of them as if something didn’t quite make sense.

Will wondered if she suspected, and if that would be a bad thing at all.

Alana didn’t say anything as they walked to the center of town, though Will could basically feel the desire she had to ask a question. He thought she was probably waiting to get Hannibal alone, which irked him further. She didn’t trust Will to give her the right answer, or at least not in the way she wanted. She didn’t want Will to even hear the question and give him the chance to offer his answer. She wanted Hannibal to be the only part of the equation.

They had already gotten a bonfire started in the center, and girls and children were dancing around it. A large wolf’s head was mounted on a stake that had been stabbed between two cobblestones, and it dripped crimson onto the ground beneath it. Will’s eyes were drawn to the sight against his will, and he felt a stab of anger at Hobbs and his men for killing it.

Hannibal’s hand was at Will’s back, offering reassurance and support. Will relaxed a bit at the touch.

“Isn’t it amazing?” Alana asked, sounding breathless as she watched the twirling figures around the fire.

Will had to bite back his natural response, which would have been a scathing comment about thinking it unwise to glorify violence. Part of him recalled what he had admitted to Hannibal only moments before, calling him a hypocrite for even wanting to say it.

“It is certainly quite a trophy,” Hannibal offered, though he sounded unenthused.

Alana didn’t seem to notice, though. She was quickly pulled away towards the fire by Margot, laughing and smiling bright as a summer day.

“That is not the wolf they were after,” Hannibal whispered to Will, leaning in to say it, “that is nothing but a regular wolf. They have slaughtered an innocent creature.”

Will caught sight of Hobbs, who was laughing merrily with a mug of drink as he talked.

“Two,” he corrected quietly.

Then, Jack Crawford entered the scene, wearing his wolf pelt as any proud man would. He looked around critically, assessing the revelry with the eye of a disapproving parent. It was clear he knew what Hannibal had just told Will, and he was unimpressed by the village’s lack of awareness.

“This is not the wolf!” Jack cried, and his voice boomed over the revelers, silencing them and dragging their attention to him.

“Yes, it is,” Hobbs called back, his own voice not as strong and now clearly affected by drink, “I killed it myself, in revenge for my daughter Abigail. We followed it to the cave where it lives, and killed it.”

The people cheered at his declaration, but were interrupted when Jack pulled the stake from the ground and threw the entire thing into the bonfire, trophy and all.

Hobbs jumped up, red faced and furious.

“What in the name of all the gods-” He began, cursing and shouting as he watched the head of the wolf burn to ashes before his eyes.

Jack raised his hands, commanding them as if performing magic.

“When a wolf of this nature is killed, it returns to its other form,” he told them plainly, “when even a piece of it dies, that piece returns to the form it knows during daylight. That form is of a person. This wolf lives in no cave. It lives here, among you. The wolf is someone you know, likely someone you trust.”

The people grew even more quiet, murmurs of suspicion and doubt rippling through the crowd.

Hobbs, enraged by someone taking his place in the celebration and dampening his victory, threw down his cup. Ale splashed over the cobblestones.

“That was the wolf, Sir Crawford,” he insisted, “And you will see. Tonight, we will have no fear, and no one shall die.”

Jack smiled wryly and bowed to Hobbs. Hobbs took it as a sign of deference, when Will knew it for what it was. Jack was going to let people die just to prove Hobbs wrong. Just so they would have no choice but to turn to him for help.

Hobbs turned back to the crowd of people and lifted his hands with a smile.

“We have killed it!” he called.

The party resumed, louder and more energetic than before.

Jack began walking toward Will and Hannibal, apparently deciding they might offer more intelligent conversation. While Will couldn’t fault him for thinking so, he could absolutely fault him for believing he was welcome to engage them at all.

“Will,” Jack said genially, “it has been quite some time since I have seen you. From your reaction to my arrival and this scene, I take it you have not seen the light in these years since our disagreement.”

Jack gestured to the celebration before them, and Will only scowled at him.

“No, Jack,” he said coldly, “I have not decided we should slaughter another intelligent creature simply because we do not understand it.”

Jack smiled, though it contained as much ice as Will’s words had.

“This wolf killed a young girl here, Will,” he said.

Will set his jaw, wanting to correct him but knowing it would be pointless. It may even backfire, as it could make Jack watch him more closely, and then it would be difficult to go forward with his plans.

“Sir Crawford,” Hannibal said pleasantly, extending a hand, “I do not believe we have been formally introduced. I am Hannibal Lecter.”

Jack accepted the hand glancing between Will and Hannibal curiously.

“A pleasure to meet you, I’m sure,” Jack said, “tell me, Mister Lecter, how does someone like you, so polite and proper, come to be associated with someone like Will?”

Will hackles raised, and he wanted to lash out. He held back, partly because he didn’t want to prove Jack right in such a spectacular fashion, and partly because it again would bring too much suspicion onto him.

Hannibal’s hand was once more on Will’s back, and he smiled politely to Jack, though Will could see the irritation. He was not pleased with Jack’s comment.

“Contrary to what you seem to think, I find Will entirely charming and intelligent. Having spoken with him, I am sure you cannot disagree with me on the latter, and the former is somewhat subjective. I only ask my company to offer intelligent conversation, so I find Will more than sufficient for such. And he is only unpleasant to be around if he finds you so.”

Will smiled a bit at that. Hannibal was right about him. He was perfectly polite and pleasant when he liked someone, but his tongue turned sharp and quick when he found anyone distasteful.

Jack raised an eyebrow, clearly not believing Hannibal.

“Well, I certainly know Will is smart,” he admitted, “but I don’t agree with him about many things. He must be very particular about his company, because I don’t think I’ve ever seen him act so pleasant with anyone as he apparently does with you.”

Will tensed.

Jack had been catching up on the town gossip since he had arrived, apparently. He had learned what people thought about Will, and Hannibal.

“Well, whenever you have seen me act, you have been around,” Will pointed out sourly, “your presence always rubs me the wrong way.”

Hannibal huffed a soft laugh, amused at Will's words, while Jack just looked at him curiously. Will thought that was a very bad sign. Jack only acted like that if he was getting ready to either trick you or turn against you. Either one was bad.

"Well, it's good to see you haven't changed a bit since I last saw you," Jack said, making Will more and more suspicious of him, "I hope you aren't angry with me for coming."

Will debated for a moment before he sighed.

"No. They called you. I'm not upset with you for answering their call. I just don't agree with everything you do and stand for."

Jack laughed at that, loud and boisterous. Will saw every head from his party turn at the sound, as if it was some kind of signal. He doubted it was, knowing it was more likely they were just attuned to Jack's voice and mood, and turned toward him whenever he did something unexpected. It was eerie to see, though.

"Very good, Will," Jack said, "I'll have to accept that. It was good to see you again."

He turned to Hannibal.

"A pleasure to meet you, Mister Lecter."

Hannibal smiled tightly and they bid Jack goodbye. Will watched him walk away with a growing feeling of dread.

"I don't believe I will be participating in this celebration," Hannibal said, looking upon the party with genuine disdain.

Will huffed a laugh.

"Neither will I," he said, "what should we do instead?"

—

Screams woke Will from his dreamless sleep and he bolted upright in his bed.

There were several people screaming. And he was alone in his little cabin.

Will quickly threw on his clothes and headed for the center of town, where he could still see the flickering light from the bonfire. Winston followed him, his fur standing on end and his hackles raised.

People were running past Will in the opposite direction, frightened and shouting. They were afraid of something.

Will saw the wolf, and all the breath left him. It was large, and powerful, and had Hobbs trapped against the wall of a building. The man had apparently been disarmed and backed up to the wall, but he looked mostly unharmed.

The wolf wasn't killing him. He was only holding him.

All at once, the wolf turned and looked at Will, the eyes sparking red in the light of the bonfire.

"Will."

That voice. Will knew it. He knew the voice, and those eyes.

Hannibal?

Will heard hooves, and turned to see Jack and his hunting party racing toward the center of town on their horses. Armed.

Will turned back to the wolf, and saw that he was waiting. Waiting for what?

"Run!" Will shouted, and the wolf took off. It ran faster than Will would have believed, barely a blur in his vision. All at once, it was gone.

The hoofbeats grew louder, and the whole world went black.

—

Will came to slowly, blinking blearily around himself. He was aware of two things. One: his head hurt like hell. Two: he was tied to a chair.

Will groaned softly.

"He's awake, sir."

Will didn't know that voice.

"Thank you, Zeller."

He knew that one. Jack.

"Will. wake up. Look at me."

Will debated over it for a moment, wanting to deny Jack's demand simply out of spite. But he ultimately decided he wasn't in the position to be making that kind of choice at the moment.

Will looked up at Jack, and saw that he was smug yet unhappy.

"Where did the wolf go?" Jack demanded.

Will frowned. His head hurt, and he closed his eyes again to block out some of the light, though it was only from a single candle.

"I don't know, Jack," he snapped, "why the hell are you asking me?"

Jack huffed unhappily.

“I am no fool, Will,” he said darkly, “you ran toward the wolf instead of fleeing. You were not attacked when it saw you. You shouted a warning to it. You are in cahoots with the beast. Tell me where it is.”

Will fought the urge to say something biting. Jack was indeed a fool. He was continuously proving it through his actions and words. But Will was at his mercy, and knew there was no one he could expect help from.

Except Hannibal.

Hannibal. The wolf. Hannibal was the wolf. Was Hannibal safe? Was he injured? Would he be around to help Will if he needed it?

“I don’t know,” Will repeated, “I have nothing to do with any of this.”

Jack was silent.

Will opened his eyes again, wincing slightly at the light. He wondered if he had bled after being hit. He wondered who had hit him. He wondered if anyone had looked at the injury, or if they had just left him.

There were other men in the room. Will guessed one of them was the previously named Zeller. They were all the men Jack had brought into town with him. And they were all glaring at Will as if he were the devil incarnate.

“You are in league with the wolf,” Jack asserted calmly, not offering room for disagreement, “you have always been on the side of the wolves. You are openly hostile to anyone who speaks against the beasts, and you worked with this one to facilitate its escape. If you will not confess to it willingly, we may have no choice but to sacrifice you to the wolf. Draw it in.”

Will felt the blood drain from his face at the words. He had no doubt Jack was ready to deliver on that threat, and there was almost no one to object. He thought Beverly would, and Alana might. But that was it. He had no other friends if Hannibal had fled. Jack would be entirely backed by the people of the village.

“Jack, listen. You know I’m not,” he pleaded, “You know I don’t want anyone to get hurt. You know I’m not a bad person. We may not agree about things, but I don’t hate you, and I didn’t think you hated me this much.”

Will saw a flicker of regret across Jack’s face, but there wasn’t a sign of doubt. Jack truly believed Will had organized this with a beast. He must have felt like Will had managed to trick him, despite him not trying to make himself be liked.

Will was in serious danger here.

—

“Will.”

Will looked up at Beverly. She was wracked with grief, and he hated to see her like that.

“I’m sorry, Will,” she said, “I tried to tell them. I tried to stop them. If they can kill the wolf before it kills you, then you’ll be safe. I don’t think they’ll try to hurt you after, if that happens.”

She grimaced, knowing well enough that Will wasn’t pleased with that.

“I don’t know what else to do, Will,” she said, “and I can’t find Hannibal. Do you think the wolf got him?”

Will shook his head.

“Don’t worry, Beverly,” he said, “everything is going to be fine. You did enough.”

Beverly wiped tears from her face and shook her head.

“You’re wrong, but thanks.”

She walked away, too smart to stay near the man who was being sacrificed as bait to a monster.

Will was tied to a pillar near the center of town, exposed and smeared in sheep’s blood. To make him more enticing, apparently. Will ruefully thought that wasn’t necessary. Hannibal would come back for him regardless of how he smelled or tasted.

Alana walked up, fidgeting and glancing around as if she was afraid of being seen near him.

“Will, why did you do it?”

Will laughed aloud, the sound surprisingly cruel coming out of his mouth.

“I don’t want to talk to you, Alana,” he said, “not if you believe them.”

Alana pressed her lips together.

“You told it to run. I saw you. It listened to you. You can’t lie to me. Not anymore. I see the truth now. But I thought you actually liked Abigail and Hannibal. Were you just tricking them both this whole time so you could feed them to the wolf? Why would you do that?”

Will closed his eyes and leaned his head back against the wooden pillar. He couldn’t stop himself from hearing her, but he refused to respond. She didn’t know what she was talking about, and she had clearly never really been his friend if she had changed her opinion of him so drastically and so quickly.

After a few moments of getting no response, Alana gave up and walked away.

The sun was setting, and the moon was already peeking over the horizon. It was red in the waning light, and Will was waiting for the wolf. For Hannibal.

Jack was hidden somewhere, also waiting for Hannibal. He was waiting, believing Will would draw the wolf he was hunting. He believed he would be able to kill it.

Will believed, and hoped, Hannibal was smarter than that. He didn't think Jack would be able to kill him. Not with so simple a trap.

But he thought Hannibal would come. Hannibal really did seem to love him. He believed it, even if it was just desperate hope on his part because he had been so hopelessly in love with Hannibal. Will believed Hannibal would come back for him.

They would find out soon enough.

—

"Will."

Will lifted his head and looked around. He couldn't see anyone in the center of the village, though the entire area was lit by the bright orange moon.

"Will."

It came again, and Will recognized the voice. It was Hannibal. He had come back for him.

"It's a trap," Will said softly, praying Hannibal would be able to hear him. He daren't raise his voice any, for fear Jack would hear and know the wolf was nearby.

"I know," Hannibal's voice came again, "I can smell the hunters all around you."

Will felt relief wash through him. At least Hannibal was not about to rush in and be killed.

"I have a question to ask you."

Will frowned in confusion, again glancing around. He still couldn't see any sign of Hannibal.

"What?" he asked.

"Now that you know the truth, know everything, will you run away with me?"

Will fought the urge to laugh. Even after everything, it had never crossed his mind to stay. He hadn't even considered rejecting Hannibal. Will had no desire to stay here, and every fiber of his soul called out to be with Hannibal. It had never been a question.

"Of course," he said, smiling to himself, "more than ever."

All at once, hell broke loose.

Hannibal was there, before Will, his eyes sparking red in his wolf face as his teeth glinted in the moonlight. Will hadn't heard him run into the center of town, and hadn't seen where he came from. He was just there, and Will couldn't have been happier.

But then he heard Jack shout.

Hannibal tore the ropes binding Will with his teeth at the same time as Jack called to his men and they all rushed out with their weapons.

Will reached up and caught Hannibal around his neck, as if he had known exactly what Hannibal intended. Hannibal pulled him up and swung around so Will landed on his back, as if riding a horse. Will's hands sunk into the thick golden fur and he clung to Hannibal with everything he had.

Hannibal leapt, and Will felt the bottom drop out of his stomach as they flew over the heads of the people. He heard shouts of protest and anger, and Jack above it all calling for chase.

What if they weren't fast enough? What if Will slowed Hannibal down and they were caught? What if Jack knew a trick to catch them?

None of that mattered, because the moment Hannibal's feet were back on the ground they were off. The landscape was a blur as Hannibal sprinted on four legs through the trees away from town.

Will didn't know how long Hannibal ran, but he was disoriented when they stopped moving.

The sun was coming up, and Hannibal was panting softly.

Will climbed down off of Hannibal's back and sighed. He felt as if his heart may never stop pounding in his chest. He had felt so much fear and excitement all at once that he would never be able to come down off of it.

Hannibal dropped something from his mouth, and it fell with a thud to the forest floor.

Will turned, and stopped in surprise.

Hobbs. Hannibal had managed to take Hobbs, and had brought him here.

For Will.

Will looked up at Hannibal, who returned the gaze expectantly.

"Even while all that was happening, you took the time to take him?" Will asked.

Hannibal nodded.

"He deserves to be punished. Jack is not likely to do that, and I highly doubt anyone else would. You are the only one who will, and you deserve to do it. He is not dead. Only unconscious. When he wakes, you can make him understand what he has done, and why he deserves to die by your hand."

Will flung his arms around Hannibal's neck and hugged him tightly, overwhelmed.

All at once, Hannibal was human again, returning the embrace and kissing the side of Will's neck.

"You're so beautiful," Will said.

Hannibal pulled back a bit to look Will in the eye. As if trying to see if Will was lying.

“Would you like to be a wolf, Will?” he asked, uncharacteristically hesitant.

Will gaped.

“Can I?” he asked, then shook himself a bit, “yes. Absolutely. I didn’t know that was possible.”

Hannibal grinned. His teeth were sharp and dangerous.

“It is for you,” he said, “And would have been for Abigail. You understood me when I spoke to you in my other form. If you could not, the change would be dangerous. Men go mad. But you are safe. I always knew you would be.”

Will wasn’t sure he understood, except that he could become that amazing creature he had seen. He could be a wolf like Hannibal was. They could be equals.

“I want it more than anything,” Will said.

Hannibal leaned forward and set his teeth gently against Will’s neck. Will felt warm and thrilled, and gasped when Hannibal bit down.

End Notes

Again, I hope you enjoyed it. I had a lot of fun with the idea. I even stayed up a bit to finish and post it for you before your birthday officially started. I doubt you'll read it right away, but I don't want to be late.
Thanks for reading <3 <3 <3

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!